

## **Assembly Bill No. 2480**

### **CHAPTER 385**

An act to amend Sections 317 and 395 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to dependent children.

[Approved by Governor September 22, 2006. Filed with  
Secretary of State September 22, 2006.]

#### **LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST**

AB 2480, Evans. Dependent children: counsel.

Existing law authorizes a child or counsel for a child, with the informed consent of the child if the child is found by a court to be of sufficient age and maturity to consent, to invoke the psychotherapist-client privilege, physician-patient privilege, and clergy-penitent privilege.

This bill would provide that a child over 12 years of age shall be presumed to be of sufficient age and maturity to consent, subject to rebuttal by clear and convincing evidence.

Existing law requires the court to appoint counsel for a child in dependency proceedings at the trial level, unless the court finds that the child would not benefit from the appointment of counsel.

This bill would require the court of appeal, in any appellate proceeding in which the child is an appellant, to appoint separate counsel for the child. The bill would also require the court of appeal, if the child is not an appellant, to appoint separate counsel for the child if the court of appeal determines, after considering recommendations of the trial counsel or guardian ad litem for the child, that appointment of counsel would benefit the child. The bill would require the Judicial Council to implement this provision by promulgating a rule of court by July 1, 2007, as specified.

The bill would also require the Judicial Council to report to the Legislature, by July 1, 2008, information regarding the status of appellate representation of dependent children, the results of implementing those provisions, and other recommendations regarding the representation of dependent children in appellate proceedings.

The bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code made by SB 678 and this bill to take effect if both bills are enacted and this bill becomes operative last.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

317. (a) When it appears to the court that a parent or guardian of the child desires counsel but is presently financially unable to afford and cannot for that reason employ counsel, the court may appoint counsel as provided in this section.

(b) When it appears to the court that a parent or guardian of the child is presently financially unable to afford and cannot for that reason employ counsel, and the child has been placed in out-of-home care, or the petitioning agency is recommending that the child be placed in out-of-home care, the court shall appoint counsel for the parent or guardian, unless the court finds that the parent or guardian has made a knowing and intelligent waiver of counsel as provided in this section.

(c) If a child is not represented by counsel, the court shall appoint counsel for the child unless the court finds that the child would not benefit from the appointment of counsel. The court shall state on the record its reasons for that finding. A primary responsibility of any counsel appointed to represent a child pursuant to this section shall be to advocate for the protection, safety, and physical and emotional well-being of the child. Counsel for the child may be a district attorney, public defender, or other member of the bar, provided that the counsel does not represent another party or county agency whose interests conflict with the child's interests. The fact that the district attorney represents the child in a proceeding pursuant to Section 300 as well as conducts a criminal investigation or files a criminal complaint or information arising from the same or reasonably related set of facts as the proceeding pursuant to Section 300 is not in and of itself a conflict of interest. The court may fix the compensation for the services of appointed counsel. The appointed counsel shall have a caseload and training that ensures adequate representation of the child. The Judicial Council shall promulgate rules of court that establish caseload standards, training requirements, and guidelines for appointed counsel for children and shall adopt rules as required by Section 326.5 no later than July 1, 2001.

(d) The counsel appointed by the court shall represent the parent, guardian, or child at the detention hearing and at all subsequent proceedings before the juvenile court. Counsel shall continue to represent the parent or child unless relieved by the court upon the substitution of other counsel or for cause. The representation shall include representing the parent or the child in termination proceedings and in those proceedings relating to the institution or setting aside of a legal guardianship.

(e) The counsel for the child shall be charged in general with the representation of the child's interests. To that end, the counsel shall make or cause to have made any further investigations that he or she deems in good faith to be reasonably necessary to ascertain the facts, including the interviewing of witnesses, and he or she shall examine and cross-examine witnesses in both the adjudicatory and dispositional hearings. He or she may also introduce and examine his or her own witnesses, make recommendations to the court concerning the child's welfare, and participate further in the proceedings to the degree necessary to adequately

represent the child. In any case in which the child is four years of age or older, counsel shall interview the child to determine the child's wishes and to assess the child's well-being, and shall advise the court of the child's wishes. Counsel for the child shall not advocate for the return of the child if, to the best of his or her knowledge, that return conflicts with the protection and safety of the child. In addition, counsel shall investigate the interests of the child beyond the scope of the juvenile proceeding and report to the court other interests of the child that may need to be protected by the institution of other administrative or judicial proceedings. The attorney representing a child in a dependency proceeding is not required to assume the responsibilities of a social worker and is not expected to provide nonlegal services to the child. The court shall take whatever appropriate action is necessary to fully protect the interests of the child.

(f) Either the child or, if the child is represented by counsel, the counsel for the child, with the informed consent of the child if the child is found by the court to be of sufficient age and maturity to so consent, may invoke the psychotherapist-client privilege, physician-patient privilege, and clergy-penitent privilege; and if the child invokes the privilege, counsel may not waive it, but if counsel invokes the privilege, the child may waive it. Subject to rebuttal by clear and convincing evidence, a child over 12 years of age shall be presumed to be of sufficient age and maturity to consent. Counsel shall be holder of these privileges if the child is found by the court not to be of sufficient age and maturity to so consent. For the sole purpose of fulfilling his or her obligation to provide legal representation of the child, counsel for a child shall have access to all records with regard to the child maintained by a health care facility, as defined in Section 1545 of the Penal Code, health care providers, as defined in Section 6146 of the Business and Professions Code, a physician and surgeon or other health practitioner, as defined in former Section 11165.8 of the Penal Code, as that section read on January 1, 2000, or a child care custodian, as defined in former Section 11165.7 of the Penal Code, as that section read on January 1, 2000. Notwithstanding any other law, counsel shall be given access to all records relevant to the case which are maintained by state or local public agencies. All information requested from a child protective agency regarding a child who is in protective custody, or from a child's guardian ad litem, shall be provided to the child's counsel within 30 days of the request.

(g) In a county of the third class, if counsel is to be provided to a child at county expense other than by counsel for the agency, the court shall first utilize the services of the public defender prior to appointing private counsel, to provide legal counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to require the appointment of the public defender in any case in which the public defender has a conflict of interest. In the interest of justice, a court may depart from that portion of the procedure requiring appointment of the public defender after making a finding of good cause and stating the reasons therefor on the record.

(h) In a county of the third class, if counsel is to be appointed for a parent or guardian at county expense, the court shall first utilize the services of the alternate public defender, prior to appointing private counsel, to provide legal counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to require the appointment of the alternate public defender in any case in which the public defender has a conflict of interest. In the interest of justice, a court may depart from that portion of the procedure requiring appointment of the alternate public defender after making a finding of good cause and stating the reasons therefor on the record.

SEC. 1.5. Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

317. (a) (1) When it appears to the court that a parent or guardian of the child desires counsel but is presently financially unable to afford and cannot for that reason employ counsel, the court may appoint counsel as provided in this section.

(2) When it appears to the court that a parent or Indian custodian in an Indian child custody proceeding desires counsel but is presently unable to afford and cannot for that reason employ counsel, the provisions of subsection (b) of Section 1912 of the Indian Child Welfare Act (25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq.) and Section 23.13 of Title 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations are applicable.

(b) When it appears to the court that a parent or guardian of the child is presently financially unable to afford and cannot for that reason employ counsel, and the child has been placed in out-of-home care, or the petitioning agency is recommending that the child be placed in out-of-home care, the court shall appoint counsel for the parent or guardian, unless the court finds that the parent or guardian has made a knowing and intelligent waiver of counsel as provided in this section.

(c) If a child is not represented by counsel, the court shall appoint counsel for the child unless the court finds that the child would not benefit from the appointment of counsel. The court shall state on the record its reasons for that finding. A primary responsibility of any counsel appointed to represent a child pursuant to this section shall be to advocate for the protection, safety, and physical and emotional well-being of the child. Counsel for the child may be a district attorney, public defender, or other member of the bar, provided that the counsel does not represent another party or county agency whose interests conflict with the child's interests. The fact that the district attorney represents the child in a proceeding pursuant to Section 300 as well as conducts a criminal investigation or files a criminal complaint or information arising from the same or reasonably related set of facts as the proceeding pursuant to Section 300 is not in and of itself a conflict of interest. The court may fix the compensation for the services of appointed counsel. The appointed counsel shall have a caseload and training that ensures adequate representation of the child. The Judicial Council shall promulgate rules of court that establish caseload standards, training requirements, and guidelines for

appointed counsel for children and shall adopt rules as required by Section 326.5 no later than July 1, 2001.

(d) The counsel appointed by the court shall represent the parent, guardian, or child at the detention hearing and at all subsequent proceedings before the juvenile court. Counsel shall continue to represent the parent, guardian, or child unless relieved by the court upon the substitution of other counsel or for cause. The representation shall include representing the parent, guardian, or the child in termination proceedings and in those proceedings relating to the institution or setting aside of a legal guardianship.

(e) The counsel for the child shall be charged in general with the representation of the child's interests. To that end, the counsel shall make or cause to have made any further investigations that he or she deems in good faith to be reasonably necessary to ascertain the facts, including the interviewing of witnesses, and he or she shall examine and cross-examine witnesses in both the adjudicatory and dispositional hearings. He or she may also introduce and examine his or her own witnesses, make recommendations to the court concerning the child's welfare, and participate further in the proceedings to the degree necessary to adequately represent the child. In any case in which the child is four years of age or older, counsel shall interview the child to determine the child's wishes and to assess the child's well-being, and shall advise the court of the child's wishes. Counsel for the child shall not advocate for the return of the child if, to the best of his or her knowledge, that return conflicts with the protection and safety of the child. In addition counsel shall investigate the interests of the child beyond the scope of the juvenile proceeding and report to the court other interests of the child that may need to be protected by the institution of other administrative or judicial proceedings. The attorney representing a child in a dependency proceeding is not required to assume the responsibilities of a social worker and is not expected to provide nonlegal services to the child. The court shall take whatever appropriate action is necessary to fully protect the interests of the child.

(f) Either the child or, if the child is represented by the counsel, the counsel for the child, with the informed consent of the child if the child is found by the court to be of sufficient age and maturity to so consent, may invoke the psychotherapist-client privilege, physician-patient privilege, and clergy-penitent privilege; and if the child invokes the privilege, counsel may not waive it, but if counsel invokes the privilege, the child may waive it. Subject to rebuttal by clear and convincing evidence, a child over 12 years of age shall be presumed to be of sufficient age and maturity to consent. Counsel shall be holder of these privileges if the child is found by the court not to be of sufficient age and maturity to so consent. For the sole purpose of fulfilling his or her obligation to provide legal representation of the child, counsel for a child shall have access to all records with regard to the child maintained by a health care facility, as defined in Section 1545 of the Penal Code, health care providers, as defined in Section 6146 of the Business and Professions Code, a physician

and surgeon or other health practitioner, as defined in former Section 11165.8 of the Penal Code, as that section read on January 1, 2000, or a child care custodian, as defined in former Section 11165.7 of the Penal Code, as that section read on January 1, 2000. Notwithstanding any other law, counsel shall be given access to all records relevant to the case which are maintained by state or local public agencies. All information requested from a child protective agency regarding a child who is in protective custody, or from a child's guardian ad litem, shall be provided to the child's counsel within 30 days of the request.

(g) In a county of the third class, if counsel is to be provided to a child at county expense other than by counsel for the agency, the court shall first utilize the services of the public defender prior to appointing private counsel, to provide legal counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to require the appointment of the public defender in any case in which the public defender has a conflict of interest. In the interest of justice, a court may depart from that portion of the procedure requiring appointment of the public defender after making a finding of good cause and stating the reasons therefor on the record.

(h) In a county of the third class, if counsel is to be appointed for a parent or guardian at county expense, the court shall first utilize the services of the alternate public defender, prior to appointing private counsel, to provide legal counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to require the appointment of the alternate public defender in any case in which the public defender has a conflict of interest. In the interest of justice, a court may depart from that portion of the procedure requiring appointment of the alternate public defender after making a finding of good cause and stating the reasons therefor on the record.

SEC. 2. Section 395 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

395. (a) (1) A judgment in a proceeding under Section 300 may be appealed in the same manner as any final judgment, and any subsequent order may be appealed as an order after judgment. However, that order or judgment shall be stayed by the appeal, unless, pending the appeal, suitable provision is made for the maintenance, care, and custody of the person alleged or found to come within the provisions of Section 300, and unless the provision is approved by an order of the juvenile court. The appeal shall have precedence over all other cases in the court to which the appeal is taken.

(2) A judgment or subsequent order entered by a referee shall become appealable whenever proceedings pursuant to Section 252, 253, or 254 have become completed or, if proceedings pursuant to Section 252, 253, or 254 are not initiated, when the time for initiating the proceedings has expired.

(3) An appellant unable to afford counsel, shall be provided a free copy of the transcript in any appeal.

(4) The record shall be prepared and transmitted immediately after filing of the notice of appeal, without advance payment of fees. If the

appellant is able to afford counsel, the county may seek reimbursement for the cost of the transcripts under subdivision (d) of Section 68511.3 of the Government Code as though the appellant had been granted permission to proceed in forma pauperis.

(b) (1) In any appellate proceeding in which the child is an appellant, the court of appeal shall appoint separate counsel for the child. If the child is not an appellant, the court of appeal shall appoint separate counsel for the child if the court of appeal determines, after considering the recommendation of the trial counsel or guardian ad litem appointed for the child pursuant to subdivision (e) of Section 317, Section 326.5, and California Rule of Court 1448, that appointment of counsel would benefit the child. In order to assist the court of appeal in making its determination under this subdivision, the trial counsel or guardian ad litem shall make a recommendation to the court of appeal that separate counsel be appointed in any case in which the trial counsel or guardian ad litem determines that, for the purposes of the appeal, the child's best interests cannot be protected without the appointment of separate counsel, and shall set forth the reasons why the appointment is in the child's best interests. The court of appeal shall consider that recommendation when determining whether the child would benefit from the appointment of counsel. The Judicial Council shall implement this provision by adopting a rule of court on or before July 1, 2007, to set forth the procedures by which the trial counsel or guardian ad litem may participate in an appeal, as well as the factors to be considered by the trial counsel or guardian ad litem in making a recommendation to the court of appeal, including, but not limited to, the extent to which there exists a potential conflict between the interests of the child and the interests of any respondent.

(2) The Judicial Council shall report to the Legislature on or before July 1, 2008, information regarding the status of appellate representation of dependent children, the results of implementing this subdivision, any recommendations regarding the representation of dependent children in appellate proceedings made by the California Judicial Council's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, any actions taken, including rules of court proposed or adopted, in response to those recommendations or taken in order to comply with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, as well as any recommendations for legislative change that are deemed necessary to protect the best interests of dependent children in appellate proceedings or ensure compliance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

SEC. 3. Section 1.5 of this bill incorporates amendments to Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code proposed by this bill and SB 678. It shall only become operative if (1) both bills are enacted and become effective on or before January 1, 2007, (2) each bill amends Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and (3) this bill is enacted after SB 678, in which case Section 317 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, as amended by SB 678, shall remain operative only until the operative date of

this bill, at which time Section 1.5 of this bill shall become operative, and Section 1 of this bill shall not become operative.

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